If you think April's hot, then watch out for May

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS

Wednesday, April 27, 2005 • 30 pages | vol. 20 | no. 138

Elton John to marry male, Canadian lover of 11 years

Palace: All jueteng rumors

Guingona confirmed on time for China leader's 3-day visit

Businessman cleared of Karen Vertido rape



IN CELEBRATION OF POPE BENEDICT XVI. President Arroyo and former President Cory Aquino lead the high government officials that attended a Mass at the Manila Cathedral on Tuesday to express solidarity with the new Pope elected last week in the Vatican.

Lacson wants PNP informant summoned

SEN. PANFILO Lacson said yesterday he knew not only the three relatives of a top government official tagged by a police officer as the biggest recipients of "jueteng" money but also the whistle-blower.

Neighbors 'heard loud noises' from Ramos house

Family court judge seeks marriage annulment



Masbate haven for manta rays

WEATHER FORECAST

Second FRONTPAGE

Farmers buck ₱10-B coco import deal

FARMERS' groups yesterday asked a Quezon City court to block a ₱10-billion import deal between a local coco oil firm and a Chinese company which they alleged would be financed from the coconut levy funds.

The farmers, grouped under the Bantay Marcos Wealth at Coconut Levy Fund, jumped the gun on the deal even before the documents could be signed by asking the court to determine the validity of the agreement.

The agreement between a subsidiary of the Coconut Industry Investment Fund Oil Mills Group (CIIF) and the China National Technical Import and Export Corp. will be signed during the visit here this week of Chinese President Hu Jintao, said Romeo Royandoyan, who moderated a press conference yesterday.

The farmers admitted they did not have proof the deal would be financed through the coco levy funds. But they said they had enough basis to believe this as the CIIF is a part of the United Coconut Planters Bank which the courts have ruled was bought with coco levy funds during the rule of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

Under a memorandum of agreement, the Chinese party agreed to supply farm machinery and equipment, including 5,000 farm tractors, 10,000 shallow well pumps and 500 diesel generators between June 2005 and May 2010.

The CIIF, through its subsidiary Legaspi Oil Goodfinn Corp., agreed to import 200 tractors, 1,000 shallow wells, 50 diesel engines and generators between June 2005 and May 2006.

Royandoyan said the deal was worth "no lower than ₱10 billion."

He said a "whistle blower" in one of the offices involved in the deal leaked a copy of the MOA to the farmers. *—B.J. Reyes and Nikko Dizon*

₱8.4-B Agusan coco project sill alive, says Yap

By TJ Burgonio

THE PHILIPPINE Coconut Authority has not abandoned a plan to establish a hybrid coconut nursery in Agusan del Sur and is pushing ahead with a feasibility study to determine the suitability of the province as a location for the project, Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap said yesterday.

Yap said, however, the November 2004 memorandum of understanding between the PCA and two other groups to explore the possibility of jointly developing 116,000 hectares of the Agusan Valley into a coconut plantation was still valid.

"You can't strike this down whimsically. We have to follow the process. We must strike this down on the basis of its merits or demerits. You can't strike it down on the basis of default or omission," he said.

The project came to public attention when the then PCA administrator Evangeline Villanueva accused Yap, who chairs the PCA, had pushed her out of the agency for questioning and refusing to support the Agusan Valley project.

Yap and Villanueva appeared at the second hearing yesterday of the Senate committee on agriculture and food's probe into the project, but no sparks flew between them.

Unsuitable

Villanueva claimed the government was planning to use the coconut levy funds to fund the Agusan del Sur project to the tune of ₱8.4 billion.

She said Agusan del Sur was not suitable as a seed nut supply base because it was far from the coast where the supply of chloride was found, among other reasons.

The PCA board, in a letter to committee chair Sen. Ramon Magsaysay Jr., disputed Villanueva's claim, saying she did not back her assertions with either research or scientific data.

The board stressed that a feasibility study, including an evaluation of the province's rainfall pattern, terrain and soil analysis, was "essential" and had yet to be completed.

"The board members are one in saying that a study on the development of Agusan is good for the coconut industry," it said in a document signed by PCA corporate secretary Jose Ping Miranda.

Echoing Yap, the PCA board said the MOU did not state that a contract had been signed between the parties to the project.

The two other signatories to the MOU were the Coconut Industry Investment Fund Oil Mills Group and UCPB-CIIF Finance and Development Corp. (CocoFinance).

"There is no contract/agreement for the alleged ₱8.4-billion coco levy project, since there is no proposal or much less a project to talk about. The ₱8.4-billion is at best a wild ballpark data in the realm of a feasibility study," it said in the statement.

Yap left the hearing at around noon to go to Malacañang, without being asked a single question on the controversial project.

The hearing focused on the status, management and utilization of coco levy funds.

Public funds

Solicitor General Alfredo Benipayo (?) said the Presidential Commission on Good Government and the Supreme Court had declared in December 2001 that the coco levy funds were "prima facie" public funds.

She said the Sandiganbayan anti-graft court ruled in July 2003 that these were "conclusively public funds" held in trust by the government for coco farmers.

Executives of the United Coconut Planters Bank, which administers the coco levy assets in the Coconut Industry Investment Fund (CIIF), said the bank was not subject to government audit.

Sen. Juan Ponce Enrile also pointed out that the CIIF has its own board of directors which is beyond the control of directors of the bank.

Sen. Sergio Osmeña demanded that Commission on Audit submit to the committee reports on their fine audit of coco levy funds to ascertain how the money was utilized over the past several years.

Yap said the government has taken steps to keep the UCPB and the CIIF boards of directors separate "so there will be no monopoly of control."

"But some problems are arising out of the separation of the two boards," she said.

Four coconut farmers sit on the UCPB board while 28 to 30 sit on the CIIF board.



NOLI MEETS THE POPE

DOJ calls Richard Gomez to tax probe

Defensor to int'l mining foes: Back off, or else . . .

Ramos asked: Why so silent on Borlongan?

Stalemate: Senators quit talks on VAT

By Juliet Labog-Javellana

SENATORS on the bicameral congressional panel yesterday suspended talks on the value-added tax reform bill and decided to stick with their position to leave the VAT at 10 percent, leaving no hope that the key measure would pass before the April 30 deadline set by Senate President Franklin Drilon.

But in a rare move inviting presidential intervention, Sen. Ralph Recto openly proposed writing "standby authority" for the President into the VAT law so she could raise the rate to 12 percent and break the stalemate with the House which passed a bill hiking the VAT to 12 percent.

Recto said the Senate panel has no plans of meeting again until a compromise is found.

"There is no need to go back to the bicam because we will fail to agree anyway so (we should) allow for political consolidation to take place," he said.

It was not clear why the senators did not want to resolve the deadlock at the bicam, which is the venue for reaching compromises, and seek presidential intervention in the face of the doctrine of separation of powers.

Recto said it was possible to state the conditions under which the President can raise the VAT rate in the VAT measure itself.

He said the National Internal Revenue Code gives the President the power to raise the tax rate, by changing the system of taxation from net to gross.

Sen. Joker Arroyo, one of the VAT hardliners, said the Senate panel decided to stick to the chamber's version because its members "fear [a] public backlash."

He said the senators would not want to lose face by changing its unanimous decision to maintain the VAT at 10 percent and lift exemptions to widen the tax base to raise enough revenues.

But he said the panel had yet to arrive at a consensus because some members worry about going against the President's wishes.

Recto revealed that there was "very extensive discussion" of a fourth option that he had presented—that of maintaining the VAT at 10 percent but giving the President the power to increase it to 12 percent in a year or two under certain conditions.

He earlier presented three other options: 10 percent, 11 percent and 12 percent.

He said the fourth option could provide the "break in the stalemate."

"We have to move on. I suppose there is VAT-fatigue for everyone," Recto said.

He said he wanted to "explore" this option and he would in fact put it down in writing and consult the minority members of his panel.

"I am not really opposed to the standby (power) because I believe they can get their target revenue from 10 percent. If after one or two years, they could not achieve their target and they need to increase, it's up to the President. I think it is possible," Recto said.

Recto, who is said to have called the President the other day after it became clear that four senators were adamant at maintaining the VAT at 10 percent—yesterday said Ms Arroyo should intervene and call for her allies in the Senate to vote for a 12-percent hike.

He suggested the President should now step in and talk to her allies to support her position.

"Since it is important to the Palace to have 12 percent, they should talk to the members of the bicam panel to get 12 percent, right?" he said.

Former DILG chief acquitted of graft

THE SANDIGANBAYAN yesterday acquitted former Interior Secretary Ronaldo Puno of the graft charges filed against him by the government for lack of evidence.

In a 77-page decision, the Sandiganbayan fourth division presided over by Justice Gregory Ong said prosecutors failed to substantiate charges that Puno just wanted to "acquire a controlling interest" in Wattmaster Inc., Philippine dealer of Motorola communications equipment, when he withdrew his signature from the contract between the firm and the government.

The decision was concurred in by Associate Justices Jose Hernandez and Rodolfo Ponferrada.

The antigraft court further ruled that the September 1998 contract for phases 4 and 5 of the Multi-Trunked Radio System never took effect.

"The MTRS phases 4 and 5 contracts that Puno signed were, for all legal intents and purposes, only proposed or proposed agreements, not duly perfected contracts as erroneously alleged in the information," the court said.

Prosecution lawyers alleged that Puno signed the multimillion-peso Motorola deal with the Philippine National Police because he wanted to get a stake in the distribution of Motorola products in the Philippines.

The PNP in 1993 planned to upgrade its two-way radios to boost its campaign against criminality. This was to be done in five phases, the first three of which were implemented during the administration of President Fidel V. Ramos.

The remaining phases came due during the term of President Joseph Estrada. As in the previous contracts, Motorola was chosen to supply the communications equipment for the police force.

Phase 4 of the project was for the procurement of the MTRS in the National Capital Region and Regions III and IV. The procurement was worth more than P99 million.

Phase 5 covered Regions I and II and had an estimated cost of P49 million.

In acquitting Puno, the court said the failure of the prosecution to prove its allegation prompted it to grant Puno's demurrer to evidence.

Nelson F. Flores

Corrections

THE STORY, "A brilliant, efficient and quiet diplomat," on the front page of the April 25 issue misstated that Flor Contemplacion was executed for the murder of her 4-year-old Singaporean ward and another Filipino maid, Delia Maga. The slain boy was Maga's ward and not Contemplacion's.

* * *

THE "COCKTALES" column of April 18, "Horses for Pacific courses," listed Social Security System president and chief executive officer Corazon de la Paz as one of the board nominees of Pacific Plans Inc. De la Paz was never elected board member of Pacific Plans Inc.

* * *

Readers may send their requests for correction of factual errors in writing to Gerry Lirio, city editor, Philippine Daily Inquirer, PDI Building, Chino Roces Avenue corner Mascardo Street, Makati City; fax Nos. 897-4793/94; e-mail addresses: glirio@inquirer.com.ph and daydesk@inquirer.com.ph.

Complaints about lack of fairness or objectivity may be sent, pending the appointment of a new readers' advocate, to Isagani Yambot, publisher, the same address and fax numbers as those of the city editor, and e-mail address: iyambot@inquirer.com.ph.

US laments recall of RP workers from Iraq

The Daily Gospel



Congress eyes repeal of Epira

MILF to boycott ARMM polls

Grudgingly, AFP releases Holy Week bombing suspect on bail

Subang: 56

Supreme Court Doctrines



Elton John to marry male, Canadian lover

John's spokesperson Gary Farrow told British Broadcasting Corp. the nuptials could be postponed until 2006. [illegible]

No honeymoon

[illegible]

Reginald Dwight

[illegible]

First hit?

[illegible]



THE LOVERS [illegible] David Furnish [illegible] AP

"Candle in the Wind"

[illegible] AP

Isang Bukas na Liham

HON. HILARIO DAVIDE
Chief Justice, Supreme Court, Manila

HON. GLORIA MACAPAGAL-ARROYO
President, Republic of the Philippines

HON. FRANKLIN DRILON AT HON. JOSE DE VENECIA, JR.
Presidente ng Senado at Speaker ng Kongreso

[illegible]

[illegible]

SERYOSONG IPATUPAD ANG PAMAMAHAGI NG LUPA SA MGA LEHITIMONG MAGSASAKA AT MANGGAGAWANG BUKID, HINDI ANG PAG-AAGAW NITO MULA SA KANILA! BUHAY AT KASAGANAHAN SA MGA MAGSASAKA, HINDI LAND RETURN AT KAMATAYAN ANG DAPAT LAYUNIN NG PAGPAPATUPAD NG REPORMANG AGRARYO!

[illegible signatories]

Masbate town a haven for manta rays





FOR SALE: Endangered manta rays priced at P1,000 each were waiting for their buyer when seized by environmentalists and authorities in Dalahican Port, Lucena City

'Dive San Jacinto'

Lucky to see 2

Rays of Hope

Conservation program

Alter Donsol

Research facility

If you think April's hot, then watch out for May

Summer in the airport

Aging air-con

Occasional showers

Colder in extreme north

Taal mayor suspended

THE SANDIGANBAYAN yesterday suspended for 90 days the mayor of Taal, Batangas in connection to the alleged purchase of some P500,000 worth of medicines from a pharmaceutical company owned by a relative.

The Sandiganbayan fourth division denied the request of Mayor Librado Cabrera that he be suspended for just 30 days because the duration of preventive suspension was three months.

The anti-graft court, quoting a decision by the Supreme Court, said they had no choice but to impose administrative sanction since Cabrera himself had conceded that the "preventive suspension is mandatory in character and that there are no discretion about it."

In July 2003, government lawyers had accused Cabrera of buying P500,000 worth of medicines from January to June 1998 from Diamond Laboratories, which is owned by a relative.

In a five-page decision, the Sandiganbayan directed Batangas Gov. Armando Sanchez to enforce the suspension order and inform the court of the action taken within five days from receipt of the suspension order.

FACT FINDING RECOMMENDATION

Probers want 7 Abu jail guards, officials charged

The WORLD

Syrian troops formally quit Lebanon



73 dead in Japan rail crash

Michael Jackson's ex-wife to testify at child sex trial



JACKSON

US clears soldiers in Italian agent's Iraq death



SPACE IMAGE

WorldBriefs

No WMD in Iraq

Still no Iraqi gov't

New Ecuador president

Bush seeks lower oil prices

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

OPINION

Liquidating liberty

EDITORIAL

HAVING endured warrantless arrests, the systematic detention of political dissidents, and having endured case after case of torture and "salvaging" or summary execution, our country has a historic obligation to reject and resist human rights violations and summary, politically motivated executions. This historical burden has devolved on government officials and the military because of their shameful, institutional, martial law record.

The efforts of Maj. Gen. Jovito Palparan, commander of the 8th Infantry Division, based in Catbalogan, Samar, who has announced that he will crush insurgency within six months to a year, is a particular cause for worry. Military operations in Eastern Visayas have been intensified, and, as our series of reports point out, members affiliated with the various organizations of the National Democratic Front claim that Palparan is systematically hunting down not the troops of the New People's Army (although he is doing that, too), but literally gunning for leaders in aboveground, and thus legitimate, groups that call themselves "people's organizations."

The Commission on Human Rights is pretty clear on this point. It has expressed alarm over what Commissioner Dominador Calamba II has called the "seemingly systematic" series of liquidations of activists. Since this year began, at least 20 leaders and members of militant groups have been killed across the country. The killers are largely suspected to have links with the military. Calamba points out that "Those being killed are all members of Bayan Muna." The human rights group Karapatan has noted that the victims were affiliated with party-list groups Bayan Muna and Anakpawis and organizations such as Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (Bayan) and Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP).

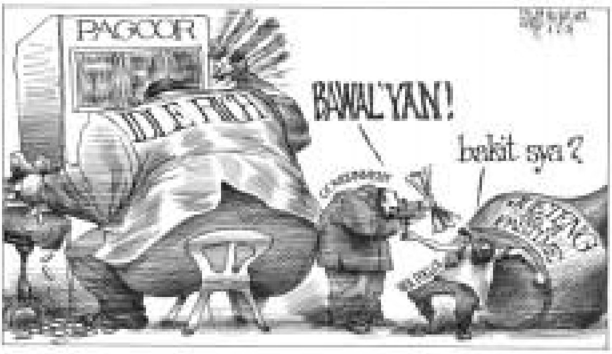
The killings aren't isolated incidents, either in terms of numbers or locality. One activist was killed in January, eight in February, nine in March and two in April. The assassinations took place in Baguio City, Bulacan, Pampanga, Tarlac, Bataan, Quezon, Camarines Norte, Cebu, Leyte and Samar. Militant leaders and their friends suggest that they have been targeted for liquidation ever since tacit alliance between the present administration and the NDF against Joseph Estrada broke up in 2001, soon after President Macapagal-Arroyo gained power. Since 2001, groups such as Plaridel count 51 coordinators and members of Bayan Muna and 19 from its allied party-list group Anakpawis as having been killed, with another 10 people abducted and still missing.

Calamba says he's sure some sort of liquidation plan is being carried out, but that, "the soldiers we interviewed say that the New People's Army is the one [responsible]. They say the [leftists] were out there killing each other."

But while it's true that the CPP-NPA has a dismal history of violently purging its own members, would it go so far as to kill its own allies, in order to accuse the government of a systematic attempt to wipe out its leaders?

Palparan's rhetoric has convinced many observers of the military's possible motive: to defeat the insurgency in its centers of power, such as Samar. Bayan Muna Rep. Teodoro Casiño has quoted Palparan as saying that "the real leaders behind the revolution are the ones in the militant organizations, those who organize rallies." Since everyone assumes the military has the means, either to coddle armed assassins or to coddle their coddlers in the civilian ranks of government, and has an obsessive desire to crush the CPP-NPA by any means, fair or foul, it makes the AFP a likely suspect. Or, to be precise, a more willing tool: the chief suspect of leftists being the administration itself.

Whatever the truth—if the CPP-NPA is in another round of purges and pinning the blame on the AFP or the AFP is running amok in the provinces, liquidating aboveground activists—the fact is that something is going on, and it demands a clear statement of policy from the President. It is not for the military or officials to judge the sincerity of leftists engaged in legal politics; all anyone needs to know is that legal organizations, of whatever persuasion, operating in the full light of day deserve full protection of the law and a guarantee of the free exercise of their constitutional rights. They are being denied those rights. They must have them.



GMA should show sincerity in cutting costs

AS I SEE IT

Neal H. Cruz

[illegible]

* * *

[illegible]

Still, impunity

THERE'S THE RUB

Conrado de Quiros

[illegible]

Nostalgia trip

ANALYSIS



Amando Doronila

'Parang jueteng'

AT LARGE



Rina Jimenez-David

Seeing beyond our heroes

LOOKING BACK



Ambeth R. Ocampo

Modern saints and martyrs

PINOY KASI



Michael L. Tan

An investment for the future

LETTERS

A clarion call for better administration of justice

Gov't should care for ordinary people

Their money, not their lives

Marikina's invisible 'no parking' signs

INQUIRER Northern Luzon

Special kids get hope in Pangasinan



RHEA Isabel Bando in one of her special education (Sped) treatment sessions.

WHEN classes open in June, 14-year-old [illegible] will go to pre-school. He should have been in high school, but cerebral palsy made his hands tremble. He cannot even hold a pencil.

[illegible]

"We are lucky that BBC is helping us," [illegible]



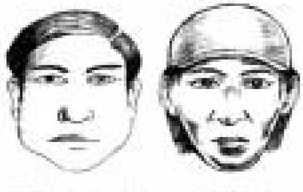
[illegible] gets help from Bando

METRO

6/42 Luzon/Vis-Min P4,872,241.50 SWEEPSTAKES P100,000.00

Police eye Echiverri 'personal affairs' as reason for killing

By Luige A. del Puerto



MMDA still in control of Metro roads, says BF

Ruling can be appealed

License confiscation

Elevated to High Court



MLQ, Doña Aurora 'reunite' at QC shrine

4 Pasay robbery suspects nabbed

MetroBriefs

SC suspends lawyer

Telenovela seminar

Reyes: RP pool needs international exposure

PBA takes over National 5





N. Vizcaya gambling lords feel heat



REBEL LAND

Antiqueños celebrate Biniraryan festival

Dealers warned of crackdown on 'gray' cell phones

Roundup

Number of rabies cases rises

City hall drug users warned

Hundred Islands Festival

Boy killed in road crash

Media on 'comment tax'

Palace: All 'jueteng' rumors



Some mediamen on 'jueteng' payroll, too, says PNP exec

Soldiers defeat Moro rebels—in basketball

Guingona confirmed on time for China leader's 3-day visit





Falun Gong members protest Hu Jintao visit

Neighbors 'heard loud noises' from Ramos house

Businessman cleared of Karen Vertido rape





Family court judge seeks marriage annulment

BUSINESS

Imports continue to slow down

[illegible]

CAP disputes findings of oversight body

[illegible]

CURRENCIES



[illegible]

STOCK MARKET



Shares end 0.1% lower

[illegible]

OVERSUBSCRIBED

Market drives down 7-year T-bond rate to 11.5%

By Michelle V Remo

RP strategic paradigm on China and Taiwan

By Jose P Leviste Jr.

Flare-up

Australia

Taipei renounces claim

Self defense

Threat

Tension

What they don't still teach you at AIM

COCKTALES

Victor C. Agustin

Money-go-round

Heard through the grapevine

Pacific clueless

CAP disputes . . .

Napocor taps 3 banks for P5-B bond float

By Elizabeth L. Sanchez

Bank of Commerce raising ₱1.2B in tier-2 capital

Disclosures

Imports continue ...

Manufacturing industry output climbed 2.4% in February

By Michelle V. Remo

AIR TRAFFIC INSTRUMENT

Subic int'l airport gets safety boost

By Allen Macasieb

Smart completes 92% acquisition of Piltel

By Elizabeth L. Sanchez

BSP sets ground rules for probing erring banks

By Doris C. Dumlao

Sun Life names new president

Turning barangay offices into efficient IT centers

By Tina Arceo-Dumlao

CORPORATE CITIZEN

No database

Improving services

Hall of Fame

Benefits



Shoe retailer Charles & Keith signs up for Alliance Software



Seven individuals will explore the Philippine in 7 days. You can do the same with Seair's Adventure Pass

Are you ready for this adventure?

By Pam Pastor

APART from launching the new Dornier 328, which can fly you to Boracay in just 35 minutes, Seair is celebrating its 10th anniversary by introducing the Seair Adventure Pass.

The Adventure Pass (worth P16,500), which will be available until May 31, entitles the bearer to an unlimited number of domestic flights on any regular Seair route for 45 days. That means you can go to Camiguin, Caticlan (Boracay), Clark, Cotabato, Busuanga, Cuyo, El Nido, Puerto Princesa, Taytay (Palawan), San Jose (Occidental Mindoro), Surigao, Zamboanga, Jolo and Tawi-Tawi every day if you want.

At the launch, Seair introduced the participants of the very first Seair Adventure Race, dubbed "Flying Pinoy in Seven Days."

This week, these seven individuals will travel to different destinations in the Philippines including Camiguin, Boracay, Surigao City, Siargao, Cebu, Clark, El Nido, etc. and face challenges both physical and mental at every leg. At the end of the race, one male contestant and one female contestant with the highest points will be proclaimed winners and receive over P100,000 worth of prizes, including Motorola phones and platinum memberships at Red Cross.

Meet the participants in our pages, pick who you think will win and win prizes of your own.

For inquiries about Seair's Adventure Pass, visit www.flyseair.com or call 8437309.

The race participants















Who do you think will win?

It's time to bring out your crystal ball

TELL us who you think will win this adventure and win exciting prizes. Choose one female and one male winner and e-mail us their names along with your name, age, school/office and contact info. If your guess is correct, you will be eligible to join the raffle. One lucky reader will win a six-month membership at Red Corner while another winner will get a Scuir Adventure Pass. Send your entries to contest2ba@inquirer.com.ph.